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Strains in Moscow's war machine

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The mighty Soviet military machine is having its problems.

Newly declassified congressional testimony by top U.S. intelligence officials indicates that economic strains within the Soviet Union are making it harder and harder to keep boosting military budgets.

There are other difficulties. Civil defense, despite heavy investments, remains inadequate. Soviet intercontinental missiles are less accurate than American ones, and the Soviets cannot seem to master solid-fuel technology for their rockets, even with major scientific efforts.

Soviet fighter planes remain far behind the United States in sophistication. And despite heavy spending, many Soviet forces stand by at a low state of readiness.

Among those testifying before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress were Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Lt. Gen. Samuel V. Wilson, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Two threads run through the testimony of both men:

First, the Soviet defense effort is massive and expensive and continues to challenge the United States for world leadership.

Second, the current level of Soviet

military spending is exacting a high price from the people of that country.

Soviet leadership appears determined to throw rubles at the defense problem until it has excelled in every major area of military power. Some of the spending figures are revealing.

During the past 10 years, for example, the Soviets have spent $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more for strategic forces, including strategic defense, than the United States.

The figures are even more impressive on specific weapons systems. In 1976 the Soviets spent six times as much as the U.S. for intercontinental missiles, $1\frac{1}{2}$ times as much for nuclear submarine strike forces, and 20 percent more for general purpose naval forces.

Civil defense is one of those areas where the Soviets have spent heavily with doubtful results. Even with extensive shelters, the intelligence chiefs agreed, the Soviet civil defense program would be ineffective against an American nuclear attack. (On the other hand, it might be useful in case of war with China.)

The rising defense budgets in the U.S.S.R. have required the Soviet people to pour an estimated 12 percent of the country's gross national product into military spending — far above the U.S. level of 5 percent.

Growing economic problems, highlighted by a slowdown in oil output, are expected to prompt Soviet leaders to begin looking for new ways to bring about defense savings in the early 1980s.